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CONGRESSIONAL FIRE SERVICES INSTITUTE

June 16, 2005

The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Dear Secretary Mineta:

Two years ago, I addressed a letter to you in support of a final rule to require the installation of Excess Flow Valves (EFV) on all applicable gas service lines in America. As representatives of interested parties assemble together today for a Public Meeting on Excess Flow Valves, I would ask that this letter be entered into the record which reaffirms the support of the Congressional Fire Services Institute for a final rule.

I am pleased that Chief Steve Halford will be testifying today on behalf of a number of fire organizations including CFSI. His testimony is from the perspective of the first responders – the men and women of our nation's fire service who willingly place themselves at great risk to rescue victims injured or trapped when pipelines break and explosions ensue.

We have all heard the adage, "Exercise on the side of caution." In this case, caution is a final rule. Anything short of that will unnecessarily place first responders and the public at risk whenever there is a natural gas leak. I am aware that benefit/cost analysis will factor into the Department's decision on whether to recommend a final rule. I am also aware that excess flow valves for residential gas service lines cost \$5 to \$15, and that the gas companies can include the cost in the price of gas sold. This seems to me a very modest price to pay for a tool that can save both lives and millions of dollars from potential property damage, annually.

This issue is of great concern to the fire service. I appreciate your attention this matter and to the testimony presented by Chief Halford on behalf of our nation's fire services.

Sincerely,

William M. Webb
Executive Director

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Joint Fire Service Position on Excess-Flow Valves

Statement of Chief Steve Halford
Nashville Fire Department

presented to the

**PIPELINE AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY
ADMINISTRATION**

OF THE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

June 17, 2005

Good Morning. My name is Steve Halford and I am the Chief of the Nashville Fire Department in Tennessee. I am here representing the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and my statement has been endorsed by the International Association of Fire Fighters, National Volunteer Fire Council, and Congressional Fire Services Institute.

I would like to thank the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, especially Ms. Stacey Gerard, the Associate Administrator for Pipeline Safety and Acting Chief Safety Officer, for inviting us to today's meeting. I would especially like to thank Congressman Curt Weldon for his support of the fire service, and his leadership on this issue. It is accurate to say that we would not be here today if it were not for Congressman Weldon's dedication to public safety.

The purpose of my testimony today is to explain to you why the members of the fire service – the organizations that

represent the men and women who respond to fires and all hazards every day – believe that it is vital that the Department of Transportation require the mandatory installation of excess-flow valves.

Every year in the United States, fire departments respond to numerous natural gas leaks. The results of these leaks can be deadly for both the fire service and the public. Here are some examples of the results of natural gas fires:

- In 1993, two firefighters in Clayton County, Georgia, were severely injured by the explosion of gas leaking from a line that was damaged when a car drove into a house;
- On July 7, 1998, a mother was killed and three family members were injured when their house exploded in South Riding, Virginia;
- On December 11, 1998, two gas company employees and two other persons were killed, 15 people were

injured, three buildings were destroyed, five were severely damaged and had to be demolished, and 14 other buildings were damaged due to a gas explosion in downtown St. Cloud, Minnesota; and

- On January 22, 1999, three people were killed, six were injured, three buildings destroyed, and many other buildings within a two block area were damaged due to a gas explosion in Bridgeport, Alabama.

The one great tragedy in these stories of death and destruction is that the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has ruled that they all could have been prevented with the simple installation of excess-flow valves. In fact, the NTSB has been identifying the need for excess-flow valves since a 1968 gas explosion in Hapeville, Georgia, killed nine people, including seven children. A recent study by Allegro identified 16 percent of the 634 incidents reported on distribution systems between 1999 and 2003 in which an excess-flow valve could potentially have reduced or eliminated consequences.

It is the men and women of the fire service who respond to these calls, who struggle to put out these horrible fires, and who have to help families deal with the tragic aftermath of losing family members and their homes. So, it is with some frustration that we come here today to urge the mandatory installation of excess-flow valves.

Unfortunately, a number of studies have been commissioned lately that cloud the issues regarding excess flow valves. So I think that I should start by laying out some facts for consideration.

Excess flow valves were developed in the 1960s at the urging of the gas industry as a means of quickly stopping leaks from lines ruptured by excavation. An excess-flow valve is designed to permit the normal operation of a gas line, but to automatically close it off when the flow of gas exceeds design limits. Its activation on a ruptured line can prevent the buildup of a dangerous level of gas in a

structure -- in most instances preventing explosion, fire, or incapacitation of the occupants.

The earliest valves may have had a reputation for being unreliable and problematic. However, the design and the procedures for picking the proper size valves and correctly installing them were improved to make them reliable.

Some experts may argue today that excess-flow valves are not 100% effective. However, more than two million of the devices have been installed voluntarily by gas companies, and they have worked reliably for 30 years.

Concerns also have been raised about the cost of installing and maintaining excess flow valves. They are generally agreed to cost between \$5 and \$15. However, a March 2004 article in Gas Industry magazine, the self-described “Authoritative Source for the Natural Gas Industry,” states that the price of excess-flow valves has dropped to \$7 or \$8. The cost for these valves can be included in the price of gas sold, which means that the cost to a gas company is practically minimal. When comparing the cost of an

excess-flow valve to the costly destruction caused by a gas explosion, a rational, thinking person might argue that the relatively modest expense of mandatory installation is a “no-brainer.”

The fire service recognizes that the gas industry goes to great lengths and spends considerable sums of money to train, educate, and prevent natural gas emergencies.

Support of one-call notice systems consumes most of the industry’s \$1 billion annual safety budget. However, this system also is not 100% effective. Not all excavators make the necessary calls. Many leaks occur on gas lines that are hit after their location was identified. Other leaks occur because gas line locations are sometimes incorrectly identified. We simply cannot predict how or when a gas line will be breached.

Excess-flow valves are an important addition to this gas leak prevention system. The excess-flow valve performs its function by preventing an excess gas release in homes and buildings when the one-call notice system is not used;

when pipelines are not clearly marked; when the required precautions are not taken during excavations; and when gas operators do not adequately coordinate with or monitor the activities of excavators. While the fire service recognizes that better use of a one-call system will reduce pipe breaches in service lines, we know that many of our friends in the gas industry recognize the importance of excess-flow valves in their gas leak prevention systems. That is why about 50 percent of the gas utilities are installing excess flow valves.

In 1999, the Department of Transportation's Office of Pipeline Safety implemented regulations stating that gas companies could voluntarily install excess-flow valves on new gas lines and for customers whose gas lines are renewed. According to these regulations, the gas companies that did not install excess flow valves would have to notify customers of the valves' benefits and availability. The companies then would give the customers the option of paying for the installation and maintenance of the valves. Under this policy, gas companies are installing

hundreds of thousands additional excess-flow valves.

However, there is still a lot of work to do.

The fire service is aware of the progress made by the 1999 regulation. While it is a good start, it is not the solution since so many gas utilities do not install excess-flow valves in new or renewed installations. Most customers with natural gas service prior to the 1999 regulation are not even covered or advised of the benefits of excess-flow valves.

The existing federal regulation also is problematic because it does not specify whom the gas companies must advise.

In the case of newly constructed residences, the builder is informed, not the eventual buyer. In some cases, the gas companies may not have provided adequate information, or have actually dissuaded customers from purchasing the excess-flow valves.

Recently, the fire service was informed that the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration may be addressing the excess-flow valve issue through the Distribution Integrity Management (DIM) Program. It is

important that a member of the fire service be included in the deliberations for this program. Any regulation that comes out of this process will affect the firefighter in the field. A member of the fire service with front-line experience can add the necessary practical knowledge to this process and ensure that the regulations are developed in a way that safeguards the American public. We are concerned that the DIM program already has developed a position on excess-flow valves without the input of an actual fire chief or firefighter. This would be a grave mistake.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for inviting the fire service to speak at today's meeting. Excess-flow valves are an important issue for the fire service. For more than 20 years, the NTSB has proven that the lack of excess-flow valves causes death and destruction. The cost of installation of these valves is not prohibitive, especially when measured against the cost of a lost family member or destroyed family home. We applaud the 50 percent of gas companies that already install these devices. However, the

fire service has a shared responsibility with the federal government to protect the public. That is why we continue to urge the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to promulgate regulations for the mandatory installation of excess-flow valves.

Thank you. I will be willing to answer any questions.